

## Guidance on COVID-19 in Foster Homes

*This guidance is intended for DCF Social Workers, Supervisors, Managers, Area Directors, Regional Directors and Central Office Family Resource and Medical Staff and issued on April 24, 2020*

As COVID-19 cases become more widespread, children, families, and foster parents may exhibit symptoms or receive positive test results. It is important to check in with your children and foster families regularly as more COVID-19 cases are reported. Let foster parents know that the [Mass.gov COVID-19](#) page and [FosterMA Connect](#) are valuable resources for up to date information on COVID-19 prevention, symptoms and resources to utilize if they have questions. Let foster parents know that if they or any children they are caring for are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19, they should let their family resource worker and the child's social worker know immediately.

The DCF Medical Team is available for consultation and continues to coordinate with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. As the Department of Children and Families (DCF) continues to do its part to reduce and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, these guidelines provide information on what to do if a child or foster family is positive, exposed to, or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

### **Children Entering Care or Moving to a New Placement**

In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, social workers should ask the parent or guardian (or staff of current placement, if applicable) the following screening questions at the time of home removal or a placement move to determine the possibility of exposure.

- Are you or anyone in your household sick with fever (Higher than 99.9 F) or a newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
- Have you or has anyone in your household been [directed to self-isolate or quarantine](#)?

If the parent/guardian answers "yes" to any of these questions or the social worker has reason to be concerned about possible recent COVID-19 exposure, *the social worker and/or supervisor should notify a manager* the child will need a foster home that has the ability and space for quarantine.

- The social worker and/or supervisor should notify their manager if there is a placement needed for a symptomatic or COVID-19 exposed child.
- The DCF Regional Nurse, along with the child's pediatrician can assist in providing caregivers with instructions on care, including determining the use of PPE if needed.

### **Children in Placement Who Are Exhibiting Symptoms**

If a child develops symptoms of COVID-19, especially when it is known that they have been exposed, foster parents should call the child's pediatrician immediately to determine next steps and should inform their child's social worker and family resource worker. If the child does not have an established pediatrician or the foster parent is having difficulty reaching the child's pediatrician, they should immediately contact their social worker, who should reach out to the DCF Regional Nurse. The Regional Nurse and the DCF Medical Team can assist in determining next steps, including coordinating with The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH). The Emergency Department at hospitals should be avoided except in cases of true medical emergencies e.g. difficulty breathing or extreme lethargy.

---

**Children in  
Placement Who  
Are Exposed but  
Not  
Symptomatic**

If COVID-19 testing is scheduled, the child should be quarantined at the foster home until results are available.

If a child is determined to be COVID-19 positive (COVID-19+), they should be isolated (as much as possible). The child's pediatrician and the DCF Regional Nurse can assist in providing caregivers with instructions on care, including determining the use of PPE. When PPE is needed, foster parents should contact their family resource worker or the child's ongoing social worker. The child's pediatrician should be called at frequent intervals to report status.

If a child in care is exposed to a COVID-19+ person, the child will need to be quarantined for 14 days away from the COVID-19+ person. Ideally a second caregiver in home could attend to the child. If the second caregiver may also have been exposed to COVID-19, they should utilize PPE (standard barrier masks and hand hygiene) when they are within 6 feet of the child until their status is resolved.

If there is not a second caregiver, DCF will need to assess whether the foster parent is able to care for the child while managing their own symptoms and ability to limit exposure to the child. If the child develops symptoms, their pediatrician should be called immediately.

*When Entering Care or Moving to a New Placement:* Social workers should ask the following screening questions at the time of home removal or a placement move to determine the possibility of exposure.

- Are you or anyone in your household sick with fever (Higher than 99.9° F) or a newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
- Have you or has anyone in your household been [directed to self-isolate or quarantine](#)?

If it is determined that the child has been exposed to a COVID-19+ person, the social worker and/or supervisor should notify a manager the child will need a placement that has the ability to quarantine in their foster home. The DCF Regional Nurse, along with the child's pediatrician can assist in providing caregivers with instructions on care, including determining the use of PPE. If PPE is needed, foster parents should contact their family resource worker or their child's ongoing social worker.

**Procedures for  
Newborns  
Exposed to  
COVID-19**

*Testing for Asymptomatic Children:* Testing for COVID-19 in asymptomatic people is discouraged by DPH. Social workers should talk to foster families to assess their own risk factors (age, medical conditions of household members, other children in the home) to determine the best match for a child.

Many hospitals are testing all well newborns born to COVID-19+ mothers to determine the need for ongoing precautions and use of PPE.

*For babies who are COVID-19+:* Frequent follow-up by phone or in-office with their pediatrician. Caregivers should use precautions to prevent household spread like masks, gloves, and hand hygiene.

*For babies who are COVID-19 negative:* Follow-up with the child's pediatrician if the child develops any symptoms, especially fever or cough.

---

**Foster Parents  
Who Are  
Positive for  
COVID-19**

If foster parents test positive for COVID-19, they should notify their child's social worker and their family resource social worker immediately. The DCF Medical team can assist in determining next steps, including coordinating with DPH.

If a foster parent is positive and not hospitalized, they should self-isolate at home for:

- at least 7 days since onset of symptoms and
- there has been no fever for at least three days without assistance of fever-reducing medication and
- improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath)

If possible, foster parents should utilize an alternate caregiver to reduce exposure to children in their home. If this not possible, and a COVID-19+ caregiver is physically able to continue care they should consult with their healthcare provider and let their social worker know. Social workers and supervisors should notify their manager and the DCF Regional Nurse. The foster parents' healthcare provider and the DCF Medical Team can provide instructions on reducing exposure including determining the use of PPE (standard barrier masks and hand hygiene) when they are within 6 feet of the child until their status is resolved.

*If a foster parent is positive and hospitalized:* An alternate caregiver will need to be located. If the foster parent does not have an approved alternate caregiver, another placement may need to be located. Potential placements will need to have the ability to quarantine.

**Foster Parents  
Who Are  
Exposed**

Foster parents who have been exposed to a person who is COVID-19+ should be quarantined for 14 days after their last exposure to that person. Another caretaker in the home should be prepared to attend to the needs of the children. If another caretaker not available, Social Workers and Supervisors should work with their manager and the DCF Regional Nurse to ensure caregivers are provided with clear instructions about safe ways to care for children including determining the use of PPE if needed. If foster parents develop symptoms, they should notify their child's social worker and their family resource worker and seek guidance from their healthcare provider immediately.

**Parent-Child  
Visits**

If a child, foster parent, or parent is positive for COVID-19 visits must occur by videoconference. If there is concern about the health of parents, foster parents, or children, social workers and supervisors should consult a manager.